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Water and Power Sub-Committee Hearing on:
H.R. 3980, “The Water Supply Permitting Coordination Act”
H.R. 3981, “The Accelerated Revenue, Repayment” and
Discussion Draft, “To Amend the Secure Water Act of 2009 to authorize the
Secretary of the Interior to implement a surface water storage
enhancement program, and for other purposes”
February 5, 2014

The Subcommittee on Water and Power has taken a great deal of testimony on what needs to be done to break down the barriers that have stopped serious development of new water storage, and this hearing begins the process of distilling that testimony into practical legislation. We have two bills and one discussion draft today to begin that process.

Droughts are not preventable. But suffering from droughts is preventable. Water is abundant, but it is unevenly distributed over time and space. We build dams to take water from wet years so that it is available in dry ones, and we build aqueducts to move water from wet areas to dry areas.

The poster child for California’s failure to do so is the Folsom Dam, the principle water storage for Sacramento and its suburbs. One million acre feet when full – it is now nearly empty. Up-river from Folsom is the site of the Auburn Dam. Half-built in the 1970s and then abandoned in the first Jerry Brown Administration, it would have provided 2.3 million acre feet of storage. It would have generated 800 megawatts of clean and inexpensive electricity for the region. At a time when we are spending billions of dollars for levees in the Sacramento Delta to protect against a 200-year flood, Auburn by itself would have provided protection against a 400-year flood.

That dam by itself could have stored enough water to fill Folsom Lake nearly two and a half times.

The first bill before us today offered by Chairman Hastings should be a no-brainer. It simply allows for the early payment of water contracts between water districts and the Bureau of Reclamation in the same manner as one would pre-pay a home loan. The cash-strapped federal treasury benefits by an immediate infusion of cash and the local districts are relieved of long-term interest costs and the attendant paperwork requirements. Right now, any district that wants to do so must come to Congress, and over the past decade, five prepayment bills have been signed into law for water districts in Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Oregon and California.

Chairman Hasting's legislation proposes to standardize this bi-partisan practice.

I am pleased to join Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis to present HR 3980, *The Coordinated Water Supply Permitting Act*.

It comes from exhaustive testimony we took last year concerning the cost-prohibitive and time consuming duplication of regulations and requirements by overlapping federal agencies when a district is trying to construct new water storage.

Under current law, districts must navigate a convoluted permitting process for the construction of new storage in which a host of federal agencies require a dizzying array of permits, decisions, and approvals -- each disjointed from the other -- despite the fact that they are studying the same project, in the same location, and trying to evaluate the same data.

To address this senseless bureaucracy, HR 3980 would put in place a framework in which federal agencies with permitting responsibilities for the construction of new surface water storage projects must work together, coordinate their schedules, share data and technical materials, and make their findings publicly available. The end result would be fewer delays, more efficient use of taxpayer dollars, and ultimately, more abundant water supplies.

Finally, the Subcommittee will consider discussion draft text offered by Chairman Hastings that would create a surface water storage enhancement program for the construction of new storage facilities and augmentation to additional facilities. The dedicated revolving account created by this program is in keeping with the beneficiary-pays principle, and will, for the first time in many years, recommit the Bureau of Reclamation to its core mission of providing abundant water supplies for multiple-use.

These bills are intended to advance the long-neglected objective of returning to the policy of abundance. More water storage equals more water for a plethora of beneficiaries, including the environment.

I'm pleased to welcome our witnesses here today from the Family Farm Alliance who will speak of this urgent need and have been instrumental in providing input on these bills.

For years, we've been told that water conservation is the answer to our problems. Water conservation is critically important in managing a major drought -- but it does not add supply.

What we are now discovering is that by exhausting conservation measures in wet years, we have no latitude to manage a drought when it comes. If this current crisis teaches us anything, it must be that there is no substitute for adding supply, and these bills begin to restore this process for a new generation that is sadder and wiser for the mistakes of their predecessors.